



Lancaster County-Wide Communications

Incident Challenges and Lessons Learned from Nickel Mines School Shooting

1. Poor Cellular coverage in rural areas.
 - a. Contacted the phone company to drop a hard line from pole to Comm. Unit.
2. Poor radio coverage because of rural setting and hilly terrain.
 - a. Set up County repeater and tower. Put IC on our system. IC could then talk freely.
3. Interoperability issues with State Police, Chester County responders, etc.
 - a. This is a common problem. State Police utilized our Comm. Unit. Chester County's Comm Unit deployed to the scene. Chester communicated w/their crews and we linked Comm Units together.
 - b. Ongoing working relationship to develop common S.O.P. between Comm Units & counties.
4. Victim identification. Eight victims in 5 different hospitals.
 - a. All dressed alike, all female, all head/face injuries.
 - b. Who is injured and where are they?
 - i. Pictures taken of injured at hospitals and e-mailed back to Comm Unit for identification.
 - ii. Matched injured child to parent on-scene.
 - iii. Coordinated transportation of parents to hospitals where their child was located.
5. Public Relations/Media.
 - a. Conflicts between Amish beliefs and English procedures.
 - i. Amish Church Bishop in IC structure.
 - b. Media helicopters interfered with medical helicopters
 - i. No fly zone established for incident and funerals. (Do you know how to get one?)
 - c. National news media on scene for 1 week. Not aware of Amish culture.
 - i. Well organized PIOs, media briefings, and media ground rules established immediately.

d. Politicians demand information and access to the scene.

i. State Police clearly said “No.”

6. Long duration event (1-week).

a. Need to consider scheduling additional staff, obtain generators, food, on scene maintenance, fuel delivery, etc.

Lessons Learned

1. Armed hostage situations require enough resources in place for worst case scenarios.
2. Have a plan for multiple helicopter response.
3. Have communications plan in place for yourself and incoming mutual aid at all levels.
4. Know who will interact with local, state, and federal responders & requests.
5. Have a plan on how to deploy Critical Incident Debriefers, mental health workers, EAP, etc. to the scene, in the EOC, in the Communications Center, schools etc. This will be a long term event for them.
6. Establish a single point of contact between PSAPs, EOCs and primary responding agencies.
7. Get ready for the media. Have people and plans in place to work with them.
8. Maintain a professional image. A bad image will last for years whether it is deserved or not.
9. Pre-planned mutual aid at ALL levels needs to be in place and exercised.
10. Know and exercise NIMS.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Public Safety.

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